

Psoriasis and Ayurveda: An Analytical Review

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ABSTRACT

Psoriasis is a non-infectious chronic relapsing inflammatory skin disease having unknown etiology, characterized by well-defined dry scaly erythematous patches and covered with adherent silvery white scales. Its prevalence in India is about 0.44–2.8 percent. Males are being affected by psoriasis two times more common than females. Ayurveda classify Psoriasis as a “*Kushtha*” disease. Both *Shaman* and *Shodhana* therapies together help to fight this disease. *Panchakarma* procedures which are helpful in this condition include *Vaman*, *Virechana*, *Raktamokshana* specially *siravedha* and *jalaaukavcharan*, *lepa*, *Shirodhara* and *parishek*.

KEYWORDS: Psoriasis, Kushtha, Panchakarma, Ayurveda

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INTRODUCTION

Skin is the mirror which reflects the harmony of internal functions of body. Any change in skin colour disturbs the patient both mentally and physically. Psoriasis is a common dermatologic disease, affecting up to 1% of the World's population¹. Its prevalence in India is about 0.44–2.8 percent. Males are being affected by psoriasis two times more common than females². It shows a lower prevalence in Asian and some African populations, and up to 11% in Caucasian and Scandinavian populations^{3,4,5}. The word Psoriasis is derived from Greek words 'Psora' means 'itch' and 'sis' meaning 'acting condition'. Psoriasis is an immune-mediated genetic disease manifesting in the skin or joints or both which is often characterized by red, itchy scaly patches, most commonly on the knees, elbows, trunk and scalp. In psoriasis, main abnormality is increased epidermal proliferation due to excessive multiplication of cells in the basal layers. The transit time of keratinocyte is shortened and epidermal turnover is reduced to 5-6 days from 28-30 days⁶. It tends to go through cycles, flaring for a few weeks or months, then subsiding for a while or going into remission. It is a common, long-term (chronic) disease with no cure.

Ayurveda classify Psoriasis as a “*Kushtha*” disease. Ayurveda texts say that Psoriasis arises due to an imbalance of two “*doshas*,” or humors “*Vata*” and “*Kapha*”. The imbalance between these two energies causes toxins to build up in a person's system, leading to inflammation.

In this article, we will review the details of this disease according to modern as well as Ayurveda point of view along with its management through both streams.

MODERN REVIEW:

Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory skin disease with a strong genetic predisposition and autoimmune pathogenic traits. Symptoms of psoriasis may vary from person to person. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Red patches of skin covered with thick, silvery scales
- Small scaling spots (commonly seen in children)
- Dry, cracked skin that may bleed or itch
- Itching, burning or soreness
- Thickened, pitted or ridged nails
- Swollen and stiff joints

Classification of Psoriasis- Psoriasis can be classified as plaque psoriasis, nail psoriasis, guttate psoriasis, pustular psoriasis, inverse psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.

- **Plaque psoriasis-** It is the most common form of psoriasis. It affects 80 to 90% of people with psoriasis⁷. It causes dry, raised, red skin patches (lesions) covered with silvery scales. Plaques might be itchy or tender. It usually appears on elbows, knees, lower back and scalp.
- **Nail psoriasis-** It can produce a variety of change in the fingernails and toenails. It causes pitting, abnormal nail growth and discoloration. Nails might loosen and separate from the nail bed.

- Guttate psoriasis- This type of psoriasis primarily affects young adults and children. It's usually triggered by a bacterial infection. It is characterized by numerous small oval (teardrop- shaped) spots on the trunk, arms or legs.
- Pustular psoriasis- This is a rare form of psoriasis. It causes clearly defined pus-filled lesions that occur in widespread patches. It is usually seen on the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet.
- Inverse psoriasis- It mainly affects the skin folds of the groin, buttocks and breasts. There may be smooth patches of red skin that worsen with friction and sweating. Fungal infections may trigger this type of psoriasis.
- Psoriatic arthritis- Psoriatic arthritis causes swollen, painful joints that are typical of arthritis. It can cause stiffness and progressive joint damage that in the most serious cases may lead to permanent joint damage.

Triggering factors- The episodes of this disease are usually triggered by following factors.

- Infections, such as Streptococcal throat or skin infections.
- Weather, especially cold, dry condition.
- Injury to the skin, such as a cut or scrape, a bug bite, or a severe sunburn.
- Stress.
- Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Heavy alcohol consumption.
- Certain medications — including high blood pressure medications and antimalarial drugs.
- Rapid withdrawal of oral or systemic corticosteroids.

AYURVEDIC REVIEW:

In Ayurveda, it is classified under "*Kushtha*". "*Kushnati Vapu iti Kushtha*" means that which makes one's skin look disgraceful or ugly or which destroys *Twak* and other *Dhatus* is called *Kushtha*.

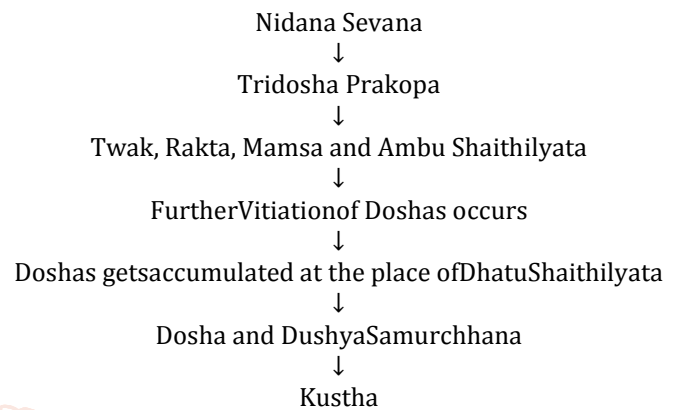
Etiology - As per Ayurveda causes of all varieties of skin diseases are common. These common causes are as follows-

- Intake of mutually contradictory food like fish and milk, intake of unctuous and heavy drinks, suppression of natural urges like vomiting, sleep, thirst etc.
- Physical exercise in excess heat climate or after taking heavy meal, Very much exposing to heat, cold, fasting and taking food
- Intake of cold water immediately after exposing to scorching sun.
- Intake of uncooked food and food before the previous meal is digested.
- Violation of laws of Panchakarma (5 purification procedures).
- Excess intake of foods like fresh grains, curd, fish, salt and sour substances
- Excess intake of black gram, radish, pastry, sesame seeds, milk, jaggery

- Sexual act in the state of indigestion; day sleep, performing sinful acts.

According to Acharya Sushruta if the person suffered from *Kushtha* in his previous life and if he takes rebirth then he develops *Kushtha* in his present life also⁸.

Pathophysiology in the view of Ayurveda- Pathophysiology of any disease is termed as *Samprapti* in Ayurveda text. The progression of any disease can be understood by knowing its *Samprapti*.



TREATMENT REVIEW:

In allopathic stream of medicine, the options include creams and ointments (topical therapy), light therapy (phototherapy), and oral or injected medication. The treatment given to a patient depends on how severe the psoriasis is and how responsive it has been to previous treatment. The topical treatment includes use of corticosteroids, vitamin D, coal tar and tazarotene.

- Corticosteroids- These are commonly first-line therapy in mild to moderate psoriasis and in sites such as the flexures and genitalia, where other topical treatments can induce irritation. Improvement is usually achieved within 2 to 4 weeks, then maintenance is achieved by use in the weekends only
- Vitamin D: Potent topical corticosteroids are superior to Calcipotriene. The efficacy of calcipotriene is not reduced with long-term treatment. Calcipotriene is applied twice daily. Salicylic acid inactivates calcipotriene.
- Coal tar: Coal Tar is the dry distillation product of organic matter heated in the absence of oxygen. Coal tar, in concentrations 5- 20% can be compounded in creams, ointments, shampoos and pastes. It is often combined with salicylic acid (2-5%), which by its keratolytic action leads to better absorption of the coal tar.
- Tazarotene: It reduces mainly scaling and plaque thickness, with limited effectiveness on erythema.

Natural ultra-violet light from the sun and artificial ultra-violet light are used to treat psoriasis.

In systemic therapy, cyclosporin A, Methotrexate, acitretin are used. Cyclosporin A binds cyclo-philin producing a complex that blocks calcineurin, reducing the effect of the NF-AT in T cells, resulting in inhibition of interleukin 2. Methotrexate blocks dihydro-folate reductase leading to inhibition of purine and pyrimidine synthesis. It also blocks AICAR transformylase, leading to accumulation of anti-inflammatory adenosine. Acitretin binds to retinoic acid

receptors. It may contribute to improvement by normalizing keratinization and proliferation of the epidermis⁷.

Ayurveda always find the root cause of the problem & move step wise to find the actual problem & then treat it along with proper internal healing of the body. Ayurvedic medicines does not cause any dependency or tolerance. Also, by the means of Panchakarma one can not only get rid of disease in a short span of time but also ensures healthy life in the future. It helps to improve the immune system of the body & to provide strength to the body. The treatment in Ayurveda is done with *Shodhana* (Panchakarma) and shaman therapies.

Panchakarma procedures which are indicated for psoriasis are *Vaman*, *Virechana*, *Raktamokshana*, *lepa*, *Shirodhara* and *Snehapana*. Sushruta has suggested external application of *Kushthagnadru* as *Shodhanalepa*. *Kushtha* patient with more vitiated *Doshas* (*Bahu dosha*) is given *Shodhana* therapies for several times, with a lot of care. Excessive elimination of *Doshas* (morbid factors) might weaken the patient and the aggravated *Vata* might endanger patient's life instantaneously. Because *Vayu* gets aggravated and the patient becomes weak soon after the elimination therapies which condition will be remedied by the administration of the *Snehapana*⁹. Shaman therapy includes the use of medicines. A few of them include:

- Intake of *Rasanjana* (solid extract prepared of the decoction of *Daruharidra*) along cow urine
- Intake of *Abhaya* along with *Trikatu* (Ginger, pepper and long pepper), *Guda* (Jaggery) and sesame oil¹⁰
- *Patolamuladi Kashaya*, *Mustadi Churna*, *Triphaladi Churna*^{11,12,13}
- *Madhvasava*, *Kanakabindvarista*, *Triphalasav*¹⁴
- Use of Sulphur: Administration of *Lelitaka* (Sulphur) with the juice of (*Amalaki*) together with honey¹⁵
- Use of Mercury: If *Rasa* (mercury) is processed by adding sulphur or *Svarnamakshika* (copper Pyrtite), the *Bhasma* so prepared would be a remedy par excellence for curing all ailments. Similarly, Mercury processed with Diamond and *Shilajatu*, or *Yogaraja* cures all ailments¹⁶

DISCUSSION:

Vaman Karma precedes *Deepana Pachana* which reduces the *Amadosha* and increases *Agni*. *Deepana-Pachana* increase metabolic activity by improving digestive system and helps to digest and excrete the metabolic waste products accumulated in tissue and system. For *Snehana*, *Siddha Ghrita* or *Taila* by *Pippali*, *Haritaki*, *Triphala* are mentioned by Acharyas. These drugs have *Ruksha*, *Ushna* properties which may be helpful in conditions like *Kushtha* where *Kleda* is aggravated. All these drugs also have *Rasayan* property which are beneficial in management of *Kushtha*. *Snehana* reduces the burning sensation (*Daha*), lubricates the body and thus reduces dryness over the scales. It also reduces the scaling. Also the external application of *Sneha* reduces dryness and scaling, hence all these procedures reduce *Vata dosha* in the body. *Sarvanga Sveda* removes obstruction in *Srotas* through *Srotoshodhaka* process. By the procedure of *Vamana*, the *Kaphadosha* gets eliminated from the body and reduces itching. *Vaman* is performed during morning time, when the levels of *Kapha* remains high. The secretory rates of CRH, ACTH, and

excessive cortisol are also high in early morning but low in evening. *Vaman* stimulates the defence mechanism of body to protect further damage, these type of changes may compel body to increase cortisol secretion in large amounts to achieve immediate effects of blocking most of the factors that are promoting inflammation. In addition to this, the rate of healing is also enhanced. In modern medicine, cortisol has been used mostly for topical application for longer period of systemic use. This indicates that it is useful but needs a longer duration¹⁷.

Marma may be correlated with vital energy of body. On stimulation they activate immune system. *Shirodhara* stimulates the *Marmas* like *Sthapni*, *Shankh*, *Utkshepa* and *Adhipati Marmas* and improves circulation. Liquid used for *Shirodhara* is always luke warm which causes vasodilatation of all the channels and thereby improving their circulation which in turn improves the blood circulation of brain. This improves the higher intellectual functions also. So by this process improvement in psychic symptoms is achieved. Improvement in circulation to hypothalamus also improves the function of Autonomic Nervous System as its stimulation during stress causes many physiological disturbances. *Takra* has *Pancha Rasa* except *Lavana Rasa*, *Amla Vipaka*, *Ushna Virya* & *Vata Kaphaghna* property. *Takra* (buttermilk) has *Vata- Kaphaghna* properties & can be used locally and also internally to treat the *Ekakushtha* (Psoriasis) which are *Vata Kapha* dominant. Buttermilk contains large amount of lactic acid¹⁸. It is scientifically proved that lactic acid is used to moisten & lessen the appearance of thickened psoriatic scales. There are so many medicaments in the market which contain lactic acid & salicylic acid. These help moisten and lessen the appearance of thickened psoriasis scales. Some available preparations include *Salex* (salicylic acid), *AmLactin* (lactic acid), or *Lac-Hydrin* (lactic acid) lotions. They generally do not have a risk of problematic skin thinning (atrophy)¹⁹.

The texts of Ayurveda consider *Rakta Dusti* as one of the prime causes of skin diseases. On the other hand, patients may get relief after letting out the vitiated blood. Sushruta provides practical guidelines for blood-letting and claims it as most effective therapy in half of all ailments²⁰. Scaling also called hyperkeratinisation due to vitiation of *Tridosha*, *Virechana* and *Shiravedhana* acts on all *Doshas* and control scaling. *Rukshata* due to mainly due to *vata Dosha*, *Virechana* correct it's by *Vatanuloman* and ultimately reducing *Rukshata*. *Aswedan* is due to the obstruction in *swadavahasrotas* *virechana* and *shiravedhana* by *Sroto-shodhak* property opens the micro channels and improves circulation resulting in perspiration. *Daha* is mainly due to *Pitta Dosha* and *Rakta Dusti*, *Virechana* removes vitiated *Pitta Dosha* and *Shiravedha* removes vitiated *Rakta* thus reducing in *Daha*. Itching indicates the involvement of *Kapha*, *Ras* and *rakta dushya*, *Virechana* has *pitta shodhaka* and *Rasa Rakta Prasadana* property²¹.

The mechanism of action of each shaman drug is probably different but they all help to normalise skin cell proliferation and reduce inflammation. *Katu*, *Tikta*, *Kashaya Rasa* are *Kapha Shamak*, hence reduces *Kandu*. *Laghu*, *Snigdha* *Gun* reduces scaling. *Ushna Virya* increase *Sveda* by *Vata Kapha Nashan*. *Dravya* with *Rakta Shodhak*, immunomodulator, *Kushtha evam Kandu Nashak* property are beneficial in this disease.

CONCLUSION:

Psoriasis is a chronic disease which can be treated with repeated *Shodhana* therapy along with the use of *shaman* drugs. Along with this self care measures should be taken by patients to better manage Psoriasis. These self care measure includes following:-

- Bathing daily helps remove scales and calm inflamed skin
- Use of moisturizer after bathing and drying while skin is still moist
- Covering of the affected areas overnight after applying ointment based moisturiser
- Expose your skin to small amounts of sunlight- A controlled amount of sunlight can improve psoriasis
- Avoid Psoriasis triggers

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